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Urban Education--Today's Problem, Tomorrow's Hope.

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This address outlined many of the problems confronting urban education. Listed as needs which are important prerequisites were such imperatives as adequate financing, changing attitudes, innovation, equalization of opportunities for the disadvantaged, and preparation and retraining of teachers. The author gave recognition to the attention in the areas of the structure and organization of the urban school system, the elimination of racially segregated schools, and to the creation of entry level jobs for youth. The apathy of the general public toward public education was noted, as well as the responsibility which the State must assume in the provisions for public education. (EB)

Address by James E. Allen, Jr.
New York State Commissioner of Education,
at the Inaugural Dinner of the
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URBAN EDUCATION -- TODAY'S PROBLEM, TOMORROW'S HOPE

Throughout our history as a nation we have been laboring to build a common school system dedicated to the principle of equality of educational opportunity for all, regardless of race, color, creed, national origin, economic status or place of residence.

Our success has been the support and the symbol of the great experiment we call American democracy. Now in the mid 1960's with the special problems of an urban society, and in the struggle to solve these problems, the feasibility of the principle of equality of educational opportunity for our day is being tested as never before.

This period of severe stress in the great metropolitan centers of our nation, building up over a long period of time, has now, through a combination of many factors and conditions of modern life, arrived at a point of crisis.

During my nearly ten years as New York State Commissioner of Education, I have had to spend a constantly increasing amount of time on city school problems. I am overwhelmed by the magnitude

of these problems and alarmed by the present lack of effective means of solving them. At the same time, however, I am convinced that one of the most challenging opportunities -- if not the most challenging -- in all of American education today lies in the revitalization of the big city school system.

The means of doing this may not be entirely clear but the necessity is undeniable and the seriousness of the problems cannot be overemphasized, nor the urgency of action too strongly stated.

Today over 60 percent of Americans live in 212 metropolitan centers. By 1980 it is estimated that 80 percent of the nation's population will live in urban areas. These areas are expanding into vast urban complexities, spreading from a central core, containing the financial, commercial and legal headquarters of the area, through nearby exclusive, prosperous neighborhoods, out into a grey area of deteriorating residential and decaying industrial and commercial neighborhoods, with all of this encircled by miles and miles of residential suburbia.

The population growth within this complex has been uneven. In the decade between the 1950 and the 1960 census the population of some major cities including Chicago, New York, Philadelphia and St. Louis decreased while their total metropolitan populations

were expanding. The suburbs have had to absorb the enormous growth in metropolitan populations.

Filling the vacuum left by movement from central cities to the suburbs are the new migrants, the Puerto Rican, the Southern white mountaineer, and the Negro -- with a high percentage unskilled and culturally handicapped. By 1970 it is estimated that Negroes and Puerto Ricans will make up 28 percent of New York City's population and comprise 50 percent of the borough of Manhattan, that Chicago will be 25 percent Negro, and St. Louis, 50 percent.

These population shifts have produced increasingly stratified communities -- the exclusive city neighborhood and the city slums, plus differentiation within the suburbs themselves into upper middle class, lower middle class, upper lower class communities and slum neighborhoods.

The problems of the urban school are of course inseparable from those of the urban community. Providing suitable educational opportunities within these vast urban complexes is a task of unparalleled magnitude, enormously complicated by inherent sociological, economic, and political considerations.

In the cities educational authorities must deal with large numbers of culturally and economically disadvantaged pupils;

racially imbalanced schools; a serious shortage of qualified teachers and auxiliary personnel; unexpected shifts in school enrollments; the need of replacing obsolete school buildings and providing additional school facilities at a time of increasing costs of sites and construction. In many cities, the procurement of funds is seriously handicapped by fiscal dependence on municipal government and by restrictions imposed by outmoded statutory tax and debt limitations. Efforts to make needed changes in educational patterns and in methods of financing are impeded by pride, prejudice and the bureaucratic and political entrenchment born of long tradition.

The decline of the school has paralleled the decline of the central city. With the great influx of the new migrants and the departure of many young middle class families to the suburbs, the urban schools have not only been left with the task of educating undue proportions of those hardest to educate -- the children of the poor, the migrant and ghetto -- but also have had to do their job in an atmosphere of rejection by the most influential segment of society.

Thus began the vicious cycle of diminishing support and deterioration in quality, giving substance to the growing myth of the inevitable inferiority of the city school system.

I use the word "myth" advisedly because, as we all know, there is good education in every city, sufficient both in quantity and quality to disprove the opinion held by many that poor education and the big city are necessarily synonomous. Some of our best American public schools are in our major urban centers, and New York City is a shining example of this fact, and while we cannot deny that many of our poorest schools are there also, the proven ability of the city to provide excellence is the hope of the future. Our challenge is to make the poorest schools as good as the best.

A measuring of the dimensions of the task against the ideal of equality of educational opportunity to which we aspire could produce feelings of pessimism and even despair. But these we cannot permit, nor are they truly justified, because there are many reasons for hope and confidence.

The discouragingly familiar tale of urban woe, so constantly before us -- truancy, delinquency, poverty, crime, unemployment -- is but one side of the story. Another tale can be told if we look at these ills in terms of the possibilities for remedy and prevention.

The present critical situation in urban education has forced an ever growing attention to these problems and many promising

approaches are under way and planned. But it must be realized that in many respects we are pioneering. We know our goals but much exploration will be necessary to discover the best paths for reaching them.

This new Center on New York City Affairs, which we are dedicating tonight, can be of inestimable help in this process of exploration and forward movement.

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While still seeking the answers, there are certain conditions or needs which seem to me to be important prerequisites.

More Money

The first of these prerequisites is money. Let me hasten to say, however, that while it is true that money alone will not do the job, it is equally true that the job cannot be done without money -- and lots of it.

The whole problem of financing education in our large cities is a major national concern. As Dr. Conant has said: "The contrast in money available to the schools in a wealthy suburb and to the schools in a large city jolts one's notions of the meaning of equality of opportunity. -- The contrast challenges any complacency we may have about our method of financing public schools -- even within a rich state like New York."

The median per pupil expenditure for operating purposes in the "Big Six" city school systems in New York State in 1963-64 was $551, whereas the comparable figure for the suburban districts surrounding these cities was $671. For New York City the per pupil expenditure in the same year was reported as $658, a relatively high figure as cities go. But if suburban communities such as Great Neck and Manhasset believe that it takes $1000 -- more than half again as much to educate a youngster from a favored background where parents and community supply an important part of the child's education, how much will it take for a disadvantaged youngster where the school must do nearly all of the job?

The initial task, therefore, is to get the urban schools adequate money.

Happily, in New York State, the first steps have been taken. For the next school year, as the result of recent legislative action in Albany, New York City will receive an estimated $54 million more in State school aid. A part of this increase is accounted for by the correction factor in the State aid formula in recognition of the higher cost of assuring equality of educational opportunity in the large cities. Undoubtedly substantial additional funds will be provided by the City. The Federal Elementary and Secondary

Education Act of 1965 is expected to add another $50 million in new money for education in the City of New York. These new Federal funds are specifically earmarked for the support of programs designed to improve the educational opportunities of the poor, the disadvantaged, the culturally deprived.

Thus, for the school year 1965-66, more than $100 million will be available to the Board of Education over and above the funds provided by present state and Federal programs and formulae.

To capitalize on this initial effort we must all -- whether we live in the city, the suburbs or upstate -- work to ensure that these infusions of new money are followed by the still larger sums so urgently needed, and as educators and citizens we must make sure that every dollar is used to maximum advantage.

To secure increased education funds for urban schools is not easy. There are many obstacles. As mentioned earlier, there are outmoded tax and debt limits in many of our large cities and the existence of fiscal controls by city governments over school budgets and expenditures. Other obstacles include insufficient public interest in the public school system, the expansion of

non-public schools, the declining tax base in relation to the educational task, and the increasing cost of essential municipal services.

Since more money is a basic prerequisite to solving the problems of urban education, it is obvious that it is essential to eliminate any deterrent factors to adequate financing. A much more intensive and comprehensive study of the financing of urban education must be undertaken, involving all levels of government.

The adequate support of all of education, including urban education, is a nation-wide concern today and it deserves to receive far more attention on a nation-wide basis than it has yet received. A most promising channel for this kind of nation-wide attention would be the Inter-state Commission on Educational Policy suggested by Dr. Conant. While Dr. Conant did not list educational finance as a specific topic for consideration, I believe that the inter-state arrangement he has proposed could serve not only the broader purposes he envisions but also provide a means for facilitating cooperative study and action in finance. I am pleased, therefore, that the idea of an Inter-state Commission on Educational Policy is now being actively explored.

Changing Attitude

Along with adequate financing, and necessary for it, is the need for a change of attitude toward the urban school. This is in many respects the most serious of all handicaps to be overcome in improving urban education because the negative and almost defeatist attitude which too widely prevails in the school system as well as among the public, has resulted in low levels of expectation which in turn have restricted the resources so essential for improvement.

The prevailing view in so many quarters that the children of the urban poor cannot be well-educated and that a school or school system with high proportions of poor, of Negroes, of immigrants, or others of lower social and economic status is bound to be inferior is wrong and must be corrected.

The presuppositions upon which to base a positive attitude toward urban education can be stated as follows:

1. Every child who is properly taught, in terms of his abilities, can and will learn; causes of failure to learn must be sought in the school and community.
2. Children differ in their ability to respond to any one approach and children from different backgrounds

will vary even more in this respect. A successful school, therefore, must use many different approaches and be ready to shift approaches until the one appropriate for each child is found.

3. A wide range of ability and potential for achievement exists in all groups, and the school must, therefore, treat each child in terms of his individual traits, not in terms of some presumedgroup characteristic.

4. Children who receive little or no help at home need more, not less help from the school. To put an inexperienced teacher in a suburban school may not be so serious, but to put him in a school where children need all that the school has to offer can be devastating, both to the children and to the teacher.

These presuppositions do not rest on hypotheses waiting to be proved. They are based on demonstrated facts. In schools throughout this city and in every city in the land, they are daily demonstrated. Children from the most deprived environments are being taught well and they do learn.

Once we gain acceptance of these presuppositions and the change in attitude which they support, we shall have moved a long way

toward the solution of the problems of urban education. Once it is recognized that the job can and must be done, money will be easier to get and able teachers will be easier to attract and hold. Thus, the vicious, negative cycle of diminishing support and deterioration in quality will be reversed, and proved performance will begin to engender the necessary support.

Innovation

The exploration needed during this pioneering period in urban education places a high priority on research and innovation. Along with more money and a more positive attitude, there must be educational reform -- a drastic overhaul of many aspects of the urban school system and a better utilization of total educational resources. This is why research and innovation and the machinery for the rapid dissemination of innovation must have a central place in all efforts to strengthen the urban school.

The new Federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 offers special opportunities and incentives for innovation. This is especially true of Title III, which provides funds for the establishment of Supplemental Education Centers. The funds authorized under Title III can be used to stimulate and assist local

school authorities in the provision of a whole host of educational programs and services that are not now available in sufficient quantity or quality. In addition, this title authorizes the establishment of exemplary schools to serve as models for better education.

The impetus given to research and innovation in the new Federal program is of prime importance and we must take full advantage of it. This is no time to be tradition bound or to worship the sacred cows of past educational practice, and a willingness to innovate must be the characteristic feature of our attack upon the problems of urban education.

It is encouraging to see the increase in this willingness which has occurred in recent years. Your new Center and the Center for Urban Education recently established by a consortium of higher education institutions in the City, under the leadership of City University, are examples of the recognition now being given to the importance of discovering new approaches.

Our research and innovation must reach out into all aspects of the educational enterprise but there are certain areas of special concern. Many of the most pressing problems in urban education are to be found in the need to equalize educational opportunities for the disadvantaged, to provide job opportunities for youth, and to

organize the urban school system for maximum educational results and administrative efficiency. These are areas of fundamental importance in urban education where the need for new insights, new techniques and new practices is especially acute, and where improvements resulting from innovation can have profound effect.

Equalizing opportunities for the disadvantaged.

It is now recognized that equalization of educational opportunity for the disadvantaged requires that we go beyond taking into account individual need in terms of innate abilities only, and seek to correct and compensate for those factors which may hamper the individual in the full exercise of his abilities in acquiring an education. How this concept is to be fully implemented is too complex a matter to be discussed in any detail at this time. In general terms, we know, however, that the responsibility of the school system will have to be broadened to include such things as preparatory pre-school programs, a vast array of remedial programs, and creative supplemental activities, all aimed at ameliorating the adverse effects of deprivation.

Teaching

There will have to be large scale, special programs for the preparation and re-training of the teachers who will work with

the educationally and culturally disadvantaged. Arrangements will have to be made to insure that the greatest teaching competence is channeled into schools where there are large proportions of such children.

The teachers and administrators working in such schools must have the full benefit of continuing research and must be helped to understand how new techniques and practices can be adapted to their schools and classes.

Curriculum

We now recognize that we have much to discover about how children learn and about the effects of varying kinds of experiences in early childhood and in the many hours not spent in school.

The special learning problems of those from deprived environments are only just beginning to be studied in depth, as are the methods of coping in adolescence or later with deficiencies in previous education. These studies have further exposed our general ignorance of the learning process. We are not sure we even understand how those learn who seem to respond best to our tutelage, and we see that many who have responded acceptably might have done far better had we known more about the learning process. Much more research is needed. Increased Federal and

State funds and new research programs are beginning to supply the need, but these programs must be expanded and given resources adequate to the complexity of the problem.

As rapidly as knowledge is acquired from these studies it must be applied and the necessary adaptations made in teaching methods and curriculum materials.

School desegregation

One of the greatest barriers to the achievement of equality of educational opportunity is the existence of racially segregated schools. The elimination of such schools in our urban centers, or wherever else they exist, is the imperative of our day. Our children have no choice but to live in a multi-racial society. The schools must prepare them to live well in that society.

The difficulties of forming policies for effective desegregation are, of course, enormous. From our experiences to date we have already learned that the most drastic kind of reorganization and adjustment is necessary. Many proposals have been advanced and are being tried throughout the country. Here in New York City the Board of Education's recently announced plans are a significant step forward in what is inevitably a long and trying process. These plans cannot succeed without the full and active

support of the total community.

The complete acceptance of the need for desegregation and for the action necessary to bring full integration into being will take time, for this is an issue charged with emotions and rooted deeply in tradition. But segregation is a denial of equality of educational opportunity, not only for the children of minorities but for all children, and our commitment to the goal of elimination of segregated schools must not be allowed to weaken because of the difficulties involved.

Organization of the urban school system

Thus far I have mentioned the needs of urban education in terms of money, attitudes, innovation and equalization of opportunity for the disadvantaged. Another area requiring attention is the structure and organization of the urban school system.

There are many who feel that most of the educational problems of urbanization stem from the enormous size of the city school systems. Their prescription for a solution is the dissolution of the system into smaller, independent units, often along borough lines. While size does make for difficulties, I believe that its significance as a cause of urban ills in education has been over-emphasized; and while there are undoubtedly certain advantages

to a division of the large systems into smaller units, I believe that the disadvantages are of greater weight and that any such structural dissolution would create more problems than it would solve. It is important that there be a central administration capable of making those decisions that are required to keep the system functioning as a coordinated whole.

The solution to the problem of bigness is not fragmentation, but the discovery and adoption of policies and procedures that take advantage of size to do what can only be done with the combined resources of a great city, leaving to the sub-units those things that are best administered decentrally.

It well may be that for many of our large city school systems, a part of the answer to their problems will lie in the formation of some type of metropolitan school district that will afford the opportunity for cooperative action with suburban communities, thus giving greater flexibility and scope for dealing with urban education problems.

It is apparent that in many instances changes are needed in the organizational and administrative patterns of our city school systems to fit them to present day needs. What these changes should be is open to question and more study and planning are

required. This is an area where the efforts of your new Center and of the Center for Urban Education can be well spent.

Jobs for Youth

All of our efforts to improve urban education will go for naught, however, if there is no place in the world of work for the young people who come from our schools. There must be suitable entry level jobs for all of our youth when they are ready to work and there must be opportunities to advance as they grow in skill, knowledge and maturity. The barriers erected by discrimination must fall. No person must be denied opportunity because of the color of his skin, the place of his birth, or the social status of his parents.

As discrimination ends and jobs are created, the task of education will be to provide appropriate training. We have much to learn about the kinds of vocational training needed in modern society, and how to provide that training for all levels of skills without perpetuating invidious distinctions among different occupations. The full cooperation of business, industry and government will be needed to help provide the kind and quality of vocational education required for the increasingly automated era in which we are living.

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It requires no special clairvoyance to see that the adequate financing, innovation, change of attitude, equalization of educational opportunity for the disadvantaged, suitable organizational and administrative patterns, job opportunities of which I have been speaking are prerequisites for the solution of the problems of urban education. Indeed, they have been advocated over and over again.

The "Power" of the city

Why, then, has not greater progress been made in establishing conditions and practices so widely considered to be necessary? The answer lies, I believe, in apathy. I am referring not to apathy on the part of the general public, though it is, of course, essential that they be aroused to the support of public education in the cities. The apathy of special concern is that of the "power" of the city. In any city there is a core of "movers and doers," persons of influence and standing who wield a great power in the ordering and managing of civic affairs.

In many smaller communities it has been possible to mobilize this "power" in the cause of good education and the results have been impressive. In the large cities it has been

more difficult to bring this "power" to bear on the problems of education. The reasons for the apathetic attitude are many, but they are not sufficient to prohibit the active participation of this group in promoting better education.

The absence of this "power" in the array of support behind public education is a vital weakness -- and one that can prevent the achievement of our goals. Indeed the job of dealing effectively with educational problems of such magnitude, touching so many lives, requiring such large proportions of public resources, cannot be done without their support. How we are to get it is a formidable question. Of course there are many individuals and groups within this core of power who do give their support to education. But what is needed now is a full mobilization of this "power" into active support, into an irresistible determination to solve the problems of urban education. Here again is an important question for the consideration of your new Center.

State leadership

It is true, of course, that responsibility for urban education does not rest with the cities alone. Constitutionally, the provision for public education in America is a function of the state. State

education departments are obligated, therefore, to provide leadership and assistance in the improvement of urban education.

In many states, state education departments are totally unprepa · for providing such leadership and assistance. Like their legislatures which created and maintain them, they have been, and to a large extent still are, heavily oriented toward rural communities.

In this regard the New York State Education Department, widely considered to be a relatively strong and influential state agency, is also somewhat remiss. Most units in the Department do provide much valuable service to city school systems, but while we have long had a special field service bureau for rural school administration, no such bureau or special services have been established for urban education.

We are now taking steps to enable the State to be of greater assistance to its urban school systems. Plans are being drawn by the Department to --

1. Establish several Regional Centers for Educational Planning and Development, located in the major metropolitan areas of the State, and organized so as to be closely attuned to their educational needs.

The detailed plans for these Centers have not yet been worked out, but they will draw heavily upon the resources of the universities in the regions and will emphasize the evaluation and dissemination of improved educational practices. Title V funds, available under the new Federal le islation for strengthening state education departments, will help finance the activities of these regional centers. Close liaison will, of course, be maintained with the Center for Urban Education in New York City and similar research groups throughout the State.

2. Create in the State Education Department an Office on Urban Education.

3. Sponsor a series of conferences this Fall on the problems of urban education in each of the State's major metropolitan centers.

To advise and assist us in the development of this program, I am pleased to announce that Mr. Max Rubin, distinguished Past President of the New York City Board of Education, has agreed to serve as a special advisor on Urban Education to my office.

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The title given to my remarks of this evening is "Urban Education -- Today's Problem, Tomorrow's Hope" and I believe that this quite accurately summarizes the situation. The very seriousness of the needs provides the opportunity for progress and the basis for hope. There is no question that the necessary resources are available for solving the problems of our urban schools. It is the bold, imaginative application of these resources that we must seek.

Alfred North Whitehead speaks of duty as "arising from our potential control over the course of events." Certainly, the duty, the obligation to provide good education in our cities is clear, and in spite of the magnitude of the problems, we do still possess the potential to control the future course of educational advance. But this potential can be realized only in action.

Let me conclude then with a further familiar quotation from Professor Whitehead -- "When one considers in its length and its breadth the importance of this question of the education of a nation's young, the broken lives, the defeated hopes, the national failures, which result from the frivolous inertia with which it is treated, it is difficult to restrain within oneself a savage rage."

I believe that the time has come when we must no longer restrain a "savage rage" at the continuing existence of problems which it is within our power to solve. Translating this "savage rage" into bold and drastic action, today's problems of urban education will be tomorrow's hope, demonstrating that equality of educational opportunity can endure as a feasible and valid principle for America's system of education.

May I congratulate the New School on the awareness of the need for action in urban affairs which has led to the establishment of this new Center, and wish for you every success.